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8 September 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : Coping with the Chronic Crisis in South Vietnam

1. It is hard to say anything new about the Vietnam crisis. We are struggling to establish a viable government capable of coping with a massive insurgency controlled and supported from Hanoi. It would be a difficult task in the best of circumstances in view of the absence of any tradition of responsible national structure of government and in view of deep-seated divisions between Buddhists and Catholics, between military and civilian leaders, and between urban and provincial populations. In the face of terrorism and guerrilla warfare, it is bound to be a long uphill struggle before a stable body politic can be fashioned out of these ingredients. In view of the successive convulsions and confusions that have struck South Vietnam since the Diem autocracy was destroyed, it has been impossible to rate the odds very high for stabilization of political authority and containment of the Viet Cong war. Our SNIE ready for USIB action this week says the chances are against such a favorable development, so the whole intelligence community is now committed to the pessimistic view which CIA has taken for about a year.

2. In looking at the problem of what to do about it, Washington policy makers tend to speak in terms of alternatives, somewhat along these lines:

(a) the US can negotiate a strategic withdrawal from Vietnam (and Laos), hiding the shame of defeat under the cloak of a neutral settlement;

(b) the US can go ahead with an intensified, "massive" counterinsurgency effort, gambling that it will show tangible benefits before the pro-US political forces in Saigon collapse altogether and we lose the local political base for maintaining the US anti-Communist effort there;

(c) the US can pursue a more militant though generally covert campaign of striking back at the North Vietnamese infrastructure of support for the

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Viet Cong insurgency, thus heartening the South Vietnamese and pressuring Hanoi either to ease off its efforts or to escalate by military moves which US forces are equipped to counter much easier than they can counter the Viet Cong;

(d) the US can adopt a militant line of bringing direct military punitive measures to bear on North Vietnam so as to make it prudent and necessary for Hanoi to discontinue active support for the Viet Cong, thus creating a new doctrine of using conventional military reprisals against the indirect aggression of subversive guerrilla warfare.

3. All of these courses of action have been spelled out in careful studies, so what is needed is not more paperwork but a firm policy of action. To date we have rejected alternative number one, strategic withdrawal, and rightly so because of the high price it would cost in US prestige and credibility in other parts of the world where we have commitments. I think we have reached the point in the road where we must consider the other courses of action not as alternatives but as essential complementary steps necessary to be taken together and quickly in order to increase the unfavorable odds of survival for a pro-US, anti-Communist regime in South Vietnam.

4. I believe we should proceed as we are beginning to do on "massive" participation in counterinsurgency efforts at the national and especially at the provincial levels. The CIA task force team wrote an excellent paper, dated 28 May 1964, explaining how to do this and, given time, Ambassador Taylor probably can make progress in this direction. But I believe something must be done to buy time for this effort to proceed. The things additional to the counterinsurgency effort that need to be done are these:

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(b) solid reinforcement of the SVN military by US forces under a "Lebanon intervention" doctrine whereby the security of the provinces surrounding the Saigon area is in effect guaranteed by at least a battalion or even a division or two of US ground forces capable of backing up an intensive counter-insurgency effort in this vital region; these troops would also lessen the likelihood of an anti-US coup, and they certainly would put down some of the fears--assiduously spread by the French--that the US really will negotiate out of Southeast Asia despite our denials; I prepared a memo for you, 3 March 1964, setting forth the "Lebanon rationale," and we gave you a memo in August suggesting "creation of a 'Show Case' Province in South Vietnam."

(c) assumption of direct responsibility for air defense of SVN by US air forces either on the ground or at sea; Ambassador Taylor and USMACV have recommended forces for this contingency.

(d) assumption by US naval forces of direct responsibility for naval coastal patrol to prevent infiltration by sea from NVN, with aggressive patrolling being permitted to amount to partial blockade of NVN albeit undeclared and not directly aimed at international shipping; CINCPAC could readily develop a plan for such operations if one is not already in hand.

5. All of these measures together, if vigorously applied, might instill an atmosphere of hope in SVN and cause the North Vietnamese to ease off the pressure in the insurgency war in SVN. I cannot say they would have this effect, because Hanoi might elect to escalate rather than lie low for a time. I think they would opt to lie low if they felt the US really meant business about meeting each escalatory step with an appropriate countermeasure. In any case, there might with this active policy of irrevocable commitment on the ground in SVN and military pressure in the air and on the sea against NVN be time and opportunity to build the fabric of government and the will to fight needed to make substantial progress in containing the Viet Cong effort and eventually liquidating it. I am sure that at worst there will not ensue a big nuclear war in Southeast Asia because the Chinese cannot fight it and the Russians will not fight it as long as our objectives are limited

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to forcing Hanoi to give up its efforts to subvert SVN. While the military and political costs of a big US investment in helping SVN may be high, I cannot think of a better place for our forces to be employed to give so much future national security benefits to the United States. Thus my conclusion is that we cannot haggle over alternative courses of action in this case but must go all out on all three tracks: counter-insurgency, covert countermeasures, and military pressures by US forces.

RAY S. CLINE
Deputy Director (Intelligence)

cc: DDCI
C/FE/DDP

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